

A Holocaust Survivor Who Became a Freedom School Teacher: Marione Ingram's Journey from Hamburg to Mississippi

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Abstract: *Marione Ingram was born in 1935 in Hamburg, Nazi Germany. In late July 1943, two days before the date of Ingram's family's deportation, the Hamburg air raid, one of the biggest air raids during World War II, began. Ingram and her mother narrowly survived it and spent the rest of the war in hiding. In 1952, Ingram immigrated to the United States to follow after her mother. Upon learning about the discrimination against African Americans, Ingram became involved in the civil rights movement to protest racial bigotry and prejudice. She worked for the March on Washington in 1963 and as a Freedom School teacher in Mississippi in 1964. Through her involvement in the civil rights movement, Ingram transformed herself from a "victim" of the Holocaust into a "combatant in a campaign against racial injustice." This study aims to demonstrate an example of how a Holocaust experience could turn into power to bring peace and equality to the world through the analysis of Ingram's autobiographies, *The Hands of War* (2013) and *The Hands of Peace* (2015), which Miyuki Kita translated to Japanese.*

Keywords: Holocaust Survivors, Hamburg Air Raid, Civil Rights Movement, African Americans, Marione Ingram, Mississippi Freedom Summer Project

Introduction

It is well known that Jews made up a large percentage of white volunteers in the civil rights movement. Oft-cited examples that illustrate the alliance and friendship between Jews and African Americans include the incident when three activists, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, were killed by the Ku Klux Klan during the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project in 1964. Two of them, Goodman and Schwerner, were Jewish. Another pertinent example is Abraham Heschel, a rabbi, who walked in the front row with Martin Luther King, Jr. in one of the Selma-Montgomery marches in 1965. Although Jews made up only 2–3% of the nation's population, they reportedly

accounted for as many as half to two-thirds of the white volunteers in the civil rights movement.¹

Previous studies explained the motivation for Jewish commitment to the civil rights movement as follows: that Jews and African Americans shared a history of “slavery,” that Judaism emphasizes “justice (tzedakah),” that Jews have experienced and remember the Holocaust, and that Jews have experienced outsider status because of anti-Semitism in the United States.² Another study pointed out that social movements in general were familiar to Jews from Russia and Eastern Europe because they had been at the center of the labor union movement in the ready-made clothes industry in the early 20th century.³

Though Rabbi Heschel’s appearance at the Selma-Montgomery march is widely known, Judaism itself did not seem to be a major reason for Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement. In fact, many students and young adults who constituted the majority of participants were either secular Jews who rarely visited synagogues and did not keep kosher rules, or recognized themselves as “very Reform Jewish.” For example, Bruce Hartford, an activist of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), said he had never been to synagogues except for opportunities to attend other people’s weddings.⁴

Similarly, previous studies did not consider the Holocaust a major reason for Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement. This is because, after the Nuremberg Trials, American Jews regarded the Nazi regime as having been destroyed, and tended to be more concerned about Israel’s independence, McCarthyism, atomic bombs, and nuclear development than about “the genocide.”⁵ There was also a tendency among Jews to refrain from asserting their Jewish identity, history, and culture because of their strong desire for assimilation into American society.

Nevertheless, according to Anita Grossmann, the Holocaust, which claimed the lives of 6,000,000 or two-thirds of European Jews, was an event that profoundly changed the way Jews viewed the world, and must have had a significant impact on their behavior in the 1960s.⁶ Indeed, the aforementioned Hartford became involved in the civil rights movement in 1962 in Los Angeles, when he watched a news film about the American Nazi Party throwing eggs at

¹ Garza, *African Americans and Jewish Americans*, 149.

² Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion*; Forman, *Blacks in the Jewish Mind*; Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters*; Schultz, *Going South*.

³ Green, “Blacks, Jews, and the ‘Natural Alliance’,” 79–104.

⁴ “Jews, Religion, and the Movement.”

⁵ Grossmann, “Shadows of War and Holocaust,” 99–100.

⁶ Grossmann, “Shadows of War and Holocaust,” 99–100.

pickets of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), which had sought to end housing-related discrimination.⁷

In this context, I would like to argue that the Holocaust holds a larger place as a reason for Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement than has been previously regarded. Indeed, by the 1970s, the center of American Jewish identity was not “adherence to Judaism,” but “remembering the Holocaust.”⁸ American Jewish historian Jonathan Sarna states that the arrest and subsequent trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1960, and the victory of Israel in the Six-Day War of 1967, have solidified this trend.⁹ Another American Jewish historian, Hasia Diner, argues that the Holocaust had been a never-to-be-forgotten event among American Jews since the 1950s, and the civil rights movement served as a platform for the commemoration of 6,000,000 people.¹⁰

The Holocaust and the Jim Crow laws differ in the respects of when, where, and how they occurred and developed. In both persecutions, however, both Jews and African Americans were deprived of their rights to employment, education, and housing, were prohibited from getting married to mainstream citizens because of “race” differences, were beaten, imprisoned, and finally murdered. It would be worthwhile to examine the parallels American Jews found between the Holocaust and Jim Crow.

This paper examines the case of Marione Ingram. She is a Holocaust survivor who became involved in the civil rights movement, which means she experienced both the Holocaust and Jim Crow firsthand. She was born in Nazi Germany in 1935, narrowly survived the Hamburg air raid, and spent the last 18 months of the war in hiding in a small shed. After she immigrated to the U.S. in 1952, she began throwing herself into the movement to protest bigotry and discrimination against African Americans. She became friends with African American colleagues and neighbors, worked for the March on Washington, and worked as a Freedom School teacher in Mississippi. Even now Ingram joined the #BlackLivesMatter movement to protest systemic racism. By looking at Ingram’s case, we can locate the Holocaust as a reason for Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement.

⁷ D.C. Everest Area Schools, *The Nation’s Longest Struggle*, 83.

⁸ Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 7.

⁹ Sarna, *American Judaism*, 333–34.

¹⁰ Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love*, 1–17, 266–73.



Marione Ingram
Source: Courtesy of Marione Ingram

Holocaust Survivors' Involvement in the Civil Rights Movement: General View

There has been a continuing influx of Jewish immigrants from Europe to the U.S. throughout history. In addition to the Sephardi Jews who arrived during the colonial period, the first wave of immigrants came from Germany in the mid-19th century, and the second wave from Russia and Eastern Europe came at the turn of the 20th century. Furthermore, more than 130,000 Jews from Germany, including Austria after its annexation, entered the U.S. after Hitler seized power and began the Nazi's anti-Semitic policies in 1933. Also, Jews

from Eastern European countries, though not as many as from Germany, entered within the quotas set by the U.S. immigration law. A further 83,000 Jewish refugees arrived after the war.¹¹ It was estimated that, as of 2001, 160,000 Holocaust survivors resided in the U.S.¹²

According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Holocaust survivors are defined as any persons, Jewish or non-Jewish, who were displaced, persecuted, or discriminated against due to the racial, religious, ethnic, social, and political policies of the Nazis and their collaborators between 1933 and 1945. They include people who were refugees, in hiding, or former inmates of concentration camps, ghettos, and prisons.¹³

In light of this definition, Abraham Heschel, who marched with Martin Luther King Jr. at the 1965 Selma-Montgomery march, was a Holocaust survivor. He was born in Warsaw, Poland, in 1907, trained to become a rabbi there and in Lithuania, and studied philosophy at the University of Berlin from 1927. After an abrupt arrest by the Gestapo in Frankfurt in October 1938, he was expelled from Germany and returned to Warsaw. Then, just before the outbreak of World War II, he was able to obtain a visa to the U.S. After a short stay in London, he eventually arrived in the U.S. in March 1940. In London, Heschel devoted himself to assisting his family to escape from Poland, but his mother and two of his sisters could not make it and lost their lives without leaving Poland.¹⁴

Rabbi Joachim Prinz, who spoke at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in August 1963 immediately before the King's turn, was another Holocaust survivor. Prinz was born in 1900 in Silesia, now Poland, was expelled from Germany, and emigrated to the U.S. with his family in 1937 because he criticized the Nazi regime and advocated Zionism. While serving as rabbi at Temple B'nai Abraham in Newark, NJ, Prinz held positions at Zionist organizations and lectured throughout the U.S., soliciting support for the establishment of Israel. When he became president of the American Jewish Congress in 1958, he invited King to appear as keynote speaker at the annual meeting that year. When students' sit-ins to desegregate lunch counters began in 1960, he immediately organized pickets in front of Woolworth's stores in Manhattan to show support for the effort in the South.¹⁵

¹¹ Sachar, *A History of the Jews in America*, 495, 559–62.

¹² Miller, Beck, and Torr, "Jewish Survivors of the Holocaust Residing in the United States, Estimates & Projections," 6–7.

¹³ "Frequently Asked Questions — *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*."

¹⁴ Kaplan, *Spiritual Radical*, 5.

¹⁵ Nadler, "The Plot for America."

Other than rabbis, Jewish scholars who fled Nazi persecution often became faculty members at black universities. This was partly because of the prevailing anti-Semitism at universities, which made it considerably difficult for Jewish scholars to secure employment. Sociologist Ernst Borinski, for example, who had arrived in the U.S. in 1938, taught at Tougaloo College in Jackson, MS, from 1947 until his death in 1983 at the age of eighty-one. Borinski was passionate about civil rights and racial integration and often arranged meetings between Tougaloo students and ones from a nearby white college since the 1950s. At Tougaloo, he established the Social Science Advancement Institute, social science forums, and the Freshman Social Science Seminar. These bodies virtually served as a base of the neighborhood civil rights movement.¹⁶

A few Holocaust survivors joined direct actions such as sit-ins at lunch counters and the Freedom Rides. The Freedom Rides, which began in 1961 under the leadership of CORE, were test rides by mixed racial groups to challenge the South's customs that enforced segregation in interstate bus seating and terminals. Alex Weiss, born in Vienna in 1936, arrived with his parents and a sister in 1940, and grew up in Fillmore of San Francisco, which was primarily a black district. Having gone to school with "black buddies" and having had a lot of black shipmates in the Navy, an outraged Weiss knocked at the door of the CORE office in San Francisco when he heard that the Freedom Riders had been attacked in Alabama. He decided to volunteer to go on the Freedom Rides because he did not want to be one of the "good Germans" who just looked and did nothing to change the status quo.¹⁷

The above are only some of the cases of Holocaust survivors' involvement in the civil rights movement. They typically were rabbis and scholars advocating civil rights in their respective ways or adults who offered financial support. Some Holocaust survivors who had arrived in the U.S. at an early age, joined direct actions. All of them, however, had emigrated to the U.S. before the extermination program began. The researchers were unable to find interviews, memoirs, or books by survivors who had spent the war years in Europe and had joined the civil rights movement. Given the aforementioned, persons such as Marione Ingram, who had first-hand experience of both the Holocaust and the civil rights movement, are very scarce, and can offer valuable information to researchers. The following chapter deals with *The Hands of War* (2013) and *The Hands of Peace* (2015) as well as Ingram's interviews and

¹⁶ Edgcomb, *From Swastika to Jim Crow*, 117–29; Lowe, "An Unseen Hand," 27–47.

¹⁷ "From the Holocaust to the Freedom Rides."

lectures, tracing her journey from Hamburg to Mississippi, and her transformation from a “victim” of the Holocaust into a “combatant in a fight for racial justice.”

Ingram’s Childhood in Nazi Germany

Marione Ingram explains in *The Hands of War*:

So, when Grandmother received her order to report to Moorweide Park, she refused to go. Although she asked us to leave, Mother and I waited with her in her apartment for the police to arrive....[T]he deportation of Hans and Aunt Emma had put her in a cold fury. Seeing our deep anxiety, she told us we shouldn’t worry about her, that she would probably be sent to the place where Hans and Emma had been taken and that she would be glad to be reunited with them even if the conditions were harsh. Although she would not cooperate with the Nazis, she instructed us to remain calm and try not to interfere with the police.

When the police arrived, Grandmother told them that she would go with them only if they returned her son. An officer wearing a black SS uniform told her that she would soon be reunited with Hans and ordered two soldiers to pick her up and put her in a van parked outside. Streaming tears, Mother pleaded with the authorities to wait until she could finish putting a few things into a bag for Grandmother to take with her. I was clinging to Grandmother, who quietly stroked my head in an attempt to calm me. When the two soldiers approached, I attacked the nearest one with my fists, but Grandmother pulled me back. Before she was lifted into the van, she quickly removed her pearl earrings and gave them to me, kissed me, and wished me a happy birthday. A soldier grabbed my wrist and tried to force me to give up the earrings, but the SS officer ordered him to let me go. “It’s her *birthday*!” he said sardonically.

“Tomorrow,” I said, angrily correcting him. “*Tomorrow* is my birthday!”¹⁸

Ingram was born in Hamburg in November 1935 as the eldest daughter of Erhard Ernst Emil Oestreicher and Margarete Singer. The Nuremberg Laws were enacted in September that same year, resulting in the intensification of the persecution of Jews. According to the Laws, marriages between Jews and non-

¹⁸ Ingram, *The Hands of War*, 10–13.

Jews were prohibited. As a child, Ingram had to endure many sufferings: she was not allowed to attend school, and was prohibited from enjoying a swing at the playground. Monica, a childhood friend living in the same apartment, did not want to play with her. In November 1941, the deportation of Hamburg Jews to Minsk began. Rosa, the maternal grandmother, Hans (Ingram's mother's younger brother), and Emma (younger sister of Ingram's maternal grandfather, who had passed away before the war), were deported soon after. The above scene is an excerpt from *The Hands of War* (2013), a recollection of Ingram's childhood in Nazi Germany, when her grandmother was deported on November 18, 1941, the day before Ingram's sixth birthday. Shortly thereafter, rumors spread through the city of Hamburg that those who had been deported to Minsk, had been murdered immediately upon arrival, or that they had been murdered in the transportation vehicles.¹⁹



Mother and Marione
Source: Courtesy of Marione Ingram

¹⁹ Ingram, *The Hands of War*, 13–14.

Because her father was Gentile, Ingram's family was able to continue residing in the city. Yet, in July 1943, Ingram, her mother, and two sisters finally received a summons to the city park for deportation. Her mother then attempted to kill herself by inhaling gas in the kitchen. It was not uncommon for Jews who had received deportation orders to commit suicide, and her mother did so in the hope that the authorities would stop pursuing her children after her death.

The mother regained consciousness the following morning through the care of seven-year-old Ingram, but later that night of the same day, the Hamburg air raid, one of the most massive air raids of World War II, commenced. The Hamburg air raid, also known as "Operation Gomorrah," was a systematic attack on the city, including residential areas, carried out by British and U.S. forces from July 24 through August 2, 1943. It lasted over a period of 10 days and nights. In particular, the massive air raid from the midnight of July 27 to the early morning of July 28 created fierce firestorms, killing 40,000–50,000 people, and leaving more than 1,000,000 homeless. The British government later called it the "German Hiroshima."²⁰

During the air raid, the mother and the daughter tried to seek safety in the shelter of their apartment building or of a church building, but were barred because they were Jewish, and had to flee for hours on end in the sea of fire, with more incendiary bombs falling close by. In *The Hands of War* (2013), these scenes are so vividly depicted that the reader can picture the charred corpses, people who were unable to move because their feet were caught in mollified hot asphalt, people burned by the phosphorus on their bodies that ignited when exposed to air, and firefighters who fell into the flames with burning ladders.

Because the city of Hamburg was totally destroyed, Ingram and her mother were presumed dead, and escaped deportation to a death camp. Survivors were fleeing the city, so they jumped on a truck without knowing where they were going, and left Hamburg where hot ashes were still fluttering down.²¹

Ingram and her mother took refuge in a small shed on the farm of a former Communist comrade of her father's, hiding there for nearly two years until the end of the war. Hiding was another endurance for Ingram. She had to face the tension of not having to be seen, even by the next-door neighbor; the constant hunger; the coldness in winter; the harshness of Frau Pimber, the farmland proprietor, toward Ingram; the nerve-racking waiting in the shed for her mother, who did not return on a stormy night; the solitary hoot of an owl;

²⁰ Budnik, "Firestorm Hell: Operation Gomorrah."

²¹ Ingram, "Operation Gomorrah," 79–94.

and the brightness of the plants and the beauty of poppy petals Ingram happened to see on the other side of the farm fence.²²

When the war was over, most of Hamburg's Jews, who numbered 17,000 before the war, were either dead or had fled. Only a hundred or so remained,²³ and it was almost a miracle that Ingram's entire family survived. Nevertheless, the Holocaust ripped the family apart in another way. Before the war, the bond between Ingram's parents was strong. Her father, a non-Jew, stubbornly refused to divorce her mother, despite the repeated threats by Nazi SS officers to do so, and having been beaten so severely that he could have died on the spot. However, her mother's spirit could not bear continuing to live in Germany, where her mother, brother, and aunt had lost their lives. For a while after the war, Ingram's parents helped refugees returning from concentration camps and hiding places, and inquired on the whereabouts of the three missing family members. When hope for their survival was finally lost, her mother divorced her father, and left Germany as the wife of a man emigrating to the United States.

Ingram's Arrival in the U.S.

Irena Powell, writing about her mother who had survived the Holocaust, states that the relationship between the survivors and their children could easily become troubled, complicated, and fraught with tension and mutually unfulfilled expectations toward each other.²⁴ Powell's mother demanded recognition for her sacrifice. She insisted that Powell should understand that it had not been easy for Powell to survive the Holocaust and how much her mother had sacrificed to save the life of her newborn infant in Nazi-occupied Poland. It sometimes was immensely difficult for her to live a "normal life," because her anger and disappointment were so intense.²⁵ The very same thing happened between Ingram and her mother.

In the fall of 1952, almost a year after her mother had left Germany, Ingram arrived in New York with a student visa. It was only two weeks before she turned seventeen.²⁶ Although Ingram adored her mother, who had ensured Ingram's survival during the firestorm of the Hamburg air raid, a psychological

²² Ingram, *The Hands of War*, 97–122.

²³ Ingram, *The Hands of War*, 122.

²⁴ Powell, *The Daughter Who Sold Her Mother*, xxii.

²⁵ Powell, *The Daughter Who Sold Her Mother*, xxii–xxiii.

²⁶ Transcript of the Oral History Interview with Marione Ingram for the Oral History Collection of the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington, September 29, 2016, 8.

distance arose between Ingram and her mother, even while still living in Germany. This distance remained after they were reunited in New York. When Ingram's stepfather found a job in Los Angeles about a year after Ingram had arrived, her mother followed him with the youngest daughter, Rena. She never asked Ingram if she would like to accompany them. Thus, the developments described in Ingram's second book, *The Hands of Peace: A Holocaust Survivor's Fight for Civil Rights in the American South* (2015), started when she became completely on her own in New York.

Ingram soon realized that there were black "ghettos" in New York, and that it was difficult for African Americans to find housing and work outside the neighborhood of Harlem. Ingram and Joan, an African American co-worker, became close friends. They looked for an apartment to live together, but were turned down by every agent. Ingram recalled that it was late in the summer of 1955 when the news of the murder of Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old African American boy from Chicago who had been abducted, tortured, and lynched in Mississippi after having been accused of allegedly flirting with a white woman in her family's grocery store, made the headlines even in distant New York. Ingram and Joan were finally told they could have an apartment, but only if the contract was in Ingram's name alone, and Joan was listed as Ingram's servant or caregiver. When they heard that, they felt they had had enough. They refused the offer and gave up renting an apartment.²⁷

Ingram later secured a job at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), and started dating and then living together with Daniel, whom she had met at a party. Daniel was a Tennessee-born Christian who had left his hometown to work for a labor relations publisher in New York because he did not like the white supremacist culture of the South. Greenwich Village, where they lived, was a gathering place for radical artists and novelists. Because of its liberal nature, it was one of the rare areas other than Harlem where African Americans could rent apartments. As a consequence, Ingram spent several years in the late 1950s in an ethnically diverse environment. In early 1960, Ingram and Daniel moved to Washington, D.C., because of Daniel's work.

Ingram's Involvement in the Civil Rights Movement

Arriving in Washington, D.C., Ingram was appalled by the severity of racial segregation that could not bear comparison with that of New York. Ingram and

²⁷ Ingram, *The Hands of Peace*, 15–16.

Daniel soon became members of CORE. At that time, CORE's Washington, D.C. chapter, led by Julius Hobson, was quite militant. Under his leadership, Ingram worked on the campaign to repeal the man-in-the-house rule, and to eliminate housing discrimination. In August 1963, Ingram volunteered as an usher for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

Supporters of the civil rights movement, including prominent figures invited by CORE, often stopped by the Ingrams' home, and it became a hangout for civil rights activists. In 1963, singer, actor, and civil rights activist Harry Belafonte visited the Ingrams nightly to discuss the movement while he stayed in Washington, D.C. for a series of performances. Also, that winter, writer James Baldwin and civil rights activist and writer Jack O'Dell visited the Ingrams' home, and spent many nights discussing the ideals of the movement and issues related to racism. Having belonged to the Communist Party, O'Dell was monitored by the federal government, which often restricted his activities. Ingram became increasingly sympathetic to those activists because her father had also been a Communist, and opposed the Nazi regime.²⁸

The crowning achievement in Ingram's involvement in the civil rights movement was a two-month sojourn in Mississippi in the fall of 1964. It began when Ingram took care of a delegation from Washington, D.C. to the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, NJ, and met Fannie Lou Hamer, a Mississippi civil rights activist, in late August of that year. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), an independent party organized mainly by local African Americans, had sent the delegation to the Convention. The MFDP challenged the established right of the Mississippi Democratic Party's delegation, which consisted only of whites, to participate in the Convention, and claimed the seats for the delegates from Mississippi. At a meeting of the credentials committee, which was to review the MFDP's eligibility to attend the Convention, Hamer, vice-chair of the MFDP delegation, gave an impressive testimony. She addressed the plight of Mississippi's black farmers and asked the audience, "Is this America?"²⁹

Born as the youngest of twenty children and having had only six years of primary education, Hamer's leadership earned her the respect and affection of young activists, who called her "Mrs. Hamer." She had been banished from the farm where she used to work and had been assaulted when she attempted to register to vote. Hamer's powerful speech was televised, resonating deeply with viewers, and attracted widespread attention. Supporters of the MFDP delegation

²⁸ Ingram, *The Hands of Peace*, 43, 73–75.

²⁹ Locke, "Is This America?" 27–37.

gathered from all over the country and slept in the fields near the Convention venue to watch the event unfolding. Eventually, however, Hubert Humphrey, the Democratic Party's vice-presidential candidate, and black civil rights leaders, including Martin Luther King Jr., worked out a compromise during behind-the-scenes negotiations: only two MFDP delegates would be made "At-Large" delegates, and the remainder would be non-voting guests of the Convention.³⁰



*Fannie Lou Hamer, Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party delegate
(Democratic National Convention, Atlantic City, New Jersey, August 1964)
Source: Leffler, Warren K. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division*

In the early morning of August 28, the MFDP delegates were on their way back to Mississippi, feeling disappointed with the Convention's outcome. Ingram happened to be seated next to Hamer on the bus from Atlantic City. She had missed her bus, but luckily got a seat on the MFDP's bus, and was able to

³⁰ Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 151–61.

ask the driver to drop her off somewhere near Washington, D.C. Ingram and Hamer had an open-hearted conversation and, before disembarking from the bus, Ingram promised to visit Mississippi, where Hamer would continue her fight against racial bigotry and segregation.

In mid-September, after a week of training at a student organization at Howard University, Ingram struck out for Moss Point, a Gulf Coast city and her place of work, as a field staffer of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Around that time, with the November presidential election approaching, racial tensions in Mississippi increased to an all-time high due to white resistance against black political participation growing stronger. Ingram and local SNCC staff, despite being harassed by arrests for minor infringements such as “speeding,” encouraged local African Americans to register. Those who were unable to register, were encouraged to vote at the “Freedom Vote” — a mock election started in 1963 to combat disenfranchisement among African Americans in Mississippi. It was organized by the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), a coalition of Mississippi’s four most prominent civil rights organizations, to demonstrate the potential power of the black vote, and what would happen if blacks in Mississippi actually registered and voted in the official election.

Then, in early October, Ingram set up a Freedom School in Pascagoula, a neighboring city to Moss Point, and began teaching on her own. It was the same type as those that had been established throughout Mississippi during the Freedom Summer Project earlier in the same year. The school building was nothing but a small, unassuming, boarded-up shack. Soon, however, someone, probably local whites, stuck a charred cross into the school’s front yard. Undaunted by the incident, Ingram painted the word “Freedom” on its crosspiece, and planted it in the front yard of the school every morning. Ingram’s behavior apparently provoked the local whites’ anger. The school began receiving threatening phone calls; it was consequently torched and finally forced to close down.

Given the heart-to-heart conversations and close rapport with local people and children at the Freedom School, Ingram found it hard to leave Mississippi. However, her sojourn came to an unsatisfying and abrupt end. On the evening of November 3, National Election Day, Ingram and her fellow workers unexpectedly had free time after they had driven the last rural voter home, and went to a nearby drugstore to stave off their hunger. When they ordered a banana split, their custom was rejected on the grounds that the store

would not serve “Niggers.”³¹ The police were called, and Ingram and her colleagues were arrested. Ingram was charged with crimes such as not carrying a driver’s license, breach of peace, resisting arrest, speeding, and even reckless and drunken driving. She was subsequently put on trial, and convicted. Her lawyers somehow succeeded in convincing the judge to approve probation. Ingram was set free, but had to leave Mississippi immediately because the original sentence could be reinstated at any time.

After returning to Washington, D.C., Ingram continued to work for various social issues: protection for the Selma-Montgomery march in 1965; the Free DC Movement, a concerted effort to bring home rule in Washington, D.C.; gun control; Shirley Chisholm’s running for the presidential election in 1972; more employment opportunities for minorities; and for sanctions against the Republic of South Africa. Then, from 1985 to 2007, Ingram and Daniel moved to and lived in Italy and Germany, where Ingram created art, began research at Hamburg’s history archives, and tackled in earnest writing a memoir of her family. After returning to the U.S., the Ingrams settled in Washington, D.C. again.

For the first time in nearly fifty years, in 2013, right after publishing her first book, Ingram visited Moss Point, MS, where she had a chance to see some of the former Freedom School students. A student became the first black person to integrate the nearby Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College; another became the first and the only black woman of the mayor of Moss Point so far; another said Ingram instilled a love of books in them and went on to serve as a school librarian for thirty years. Learning these, Ingram knew she had achieved something in Mississippi.³²

Past the age of eighty, Ingram continues to be an activist. She has been concerned about the voter ID laws and the status quo after Trump’s election and tenure. She participated in demonstrations and rallies related to Black Lives Matter in Washington, D.C. in 2020 and thereafter.

Ingram’s Internal Change of Consciousness: From Anger and Hatred to Love

In *The Hands of Peace* (2015), Ingram did not mention her association with Jews living in the U.S. Although she eagerly studied Hebrew and Jewish ethics for a period when in Germany, she had never attended a synagogue after

³¹ Ingram, *The Hands of Peace*, 125.

³² Ingram, *The Hands of Peace*, 171–172.

emigrating to the U.S., and has not particularly lived a life as a Jew. Although she had some Jewish acquaintances and friends, Ingram met them either at the art museum in New York, or during the activities of civil rights organizations in Washington, D.C.³³

Since Ingram was harassed and bullied by her classmates and Nazi teachers when she attended public school in Hamburg, she thoroughly enjoyed life in New York for a while after she had arrived in the U.S., as “no one seemed to care whether I or anyone else was a Jew.”³⁴ When asked about her origins because of her foreign accent, Ingram usually avoided giving a straight answer, letting people guess and not correcting them when they were wrong or confirming when they were correct. She adopted such an attitude because she did not care for her nationality, and wanted to keep from being lumped with the people who had tried to kill her and her family.³⁵ In the 1950s, the term “Holocaust” had not yet taken hold in the U.S., and details of the Jewish genocide by the Nazis were not widely known among general citizens. Under those circumstances, having to explain being a victim of the Holocaust had been a painful task for Ingram.

However, through her involvement in the civil rights movement, especially her sojourn in Mississippi, Ingram became more aware of her Jewishness and began to identify herself as a Jew. Late at night on the bus home from the Democratic National Convention, Ingram had a close conversation with Fannie Lou Hamer. Ingram recalls the moment:

Except for Daniel, I almost never talked with anyone, especially someone I just met, about painful childhood experiences such as the one I had relived the night before. Out of character, I’d let a *Washington Post* reporter who had heard about it interview me earlier in the day, and he’d asked a number of questions about disturbing events. Perhaps because those freshly aroused memories were still with me and I still felt sheepish about the episode, and because I was with a strong woman who had experienced violent racial hatred, I opened up about how I had felt as a child, and how I felt then, as an adult. She tactfully let me know that she had heard about the incident on the boardwalk, but that she didn’t know the details of it. She didn’t register any surprise when I told her that, as Jews, my mother and I had been denied entry to a bomb shelter and even a church during air raids. Only later did

³³ Marione Ingram, e-mail interview by author, June 22, 2020.

³⁴ Ingram, *The Hands of Peace*, 9.

³⁵ Ingram, *The Hands of Peace*, 9–10.

she say that she had guessed when I entered the bus that I might be the one who had been upset by the fireworks.³⁶

The night before, Ingram fainted because of a flashback of the Hamburg air raid caused by the sound and flares of the fireworks celebrating President Lyndon Johnson's birthday. Learning that Hamer was determined to keep fighting in Mississippi until either she or Jim Crow was dead, Ingram promised to go to Mississippi. Ingram describes the sense of mission she felt as follows: "Her words and mine reverberated in my body as I promised to go to Mississippi. I think my body knew that I had been on the way for a long time."³⁷

Ingram's determination was firm. Though her mother was strongly opposed, Ingram rather hoped that her visit to Mississippi would narrow the distance that had arisen between her and her mother since the time they were in Hamburg. She insisted that she had to go because of what had happened in Germany.³⁸

Throughout her two-month stay in Mississippi, the Holocaust was always in Ingram's mind. This can be observed from the scene of Ingram's arrival in Moss Point:

He [Tilmon] said the Scotts were an elderly couple who strongly supported the movement and had volunteered to take me into their home. He added that I would be the first white civil rights worker in Moss Point to live with a Negro family.

"Mama Scott will take good care of you," Mrs. Parker said. "She'll put some meat on those bones."

Feeling immediately less tired, I asked where the whites who had participated in the Summer Project had lived. Tilmon said most of them had rented motel rooms or apartments. I began to feel suffused with pleasure at the prospect of living with the elderly couple, especially Mama Scott. It would be like having a grandmother again, a private victory over the Nazis who had taken mine away from me.³⁹

Soon after, at a rally at a black church calling for voter registration, Ingram revealed that she was a Holocaust survivor, saying that she was a Jew born in Nazi Germany, and that she had come to America to find freedom, but

³⁶ Ingram, *The Hands of Peace*, 86.

³⁷ Ingram, *The Hands of Peace*, 87.

³⁸ Ingram, *The Hands of Peace*, 90–91.

³⁹ Ingram, *The Hands of Peace*, 95–96.

had found that many people here were not free.⁴⁰ Thereafter, Ingram devoted herself to her work in Moss Point. She described herself as having contracted a “disease called Mississippi.”⁴¹ It was an experience in which her past—her anger against the Holocaust and sense of duty towards its victims—was replaced by the somewhat delirious feeling of an affair of the heart.⁴² She describes the experience as follows:

Each morning I awoke excited by the challenges that lay ahead, and each day I became more attached to the people I lived and worked with. I loved them for the dangers they had passed as well as for the content of their character. I adored their cool as they invoked the wrath of Mr. Charlie, their stubborn dignity in the face of intimidation and derision, their deft skewering of pretensions and their irrepressible humor before, after, and even during a confrontation. But most of all I loved them for their warmth and openness to me, for sharing their vulnerability as well as their strength, and for allowing me to nest in their affections.⁴³

In a letter to her husband, Daniel, Ingram insisted that the civil rights movement had to end in success because “it is only through Mississippi that we can change America into what it can and should be.”⁴⁴ When she replaced the charred cross in the front yard of the Freedom School with a “Freedom Cross,” Ingram felt she had replaced a symbol of aggression and hate with that of love and hope.⁴⁵

The June 1964 murders of James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman occurred not far from Moss Point, but the murderers had not yet been arrested. In the midst of the tension that the murderers could be close at hand, Ingram learned that Jews were also a target of the Ku Klux Klan’s hatred, and that the White Citizens’ Council and local Whites would already know that Ingram was a Jew. But Ingram responded to this situation with a sense of fulfillment and achievement because she was able to take action rather than feeling threatened and intimidated. She proudly said, “In a very personal way, I was fighting back for those who had been powerless and friendless

⁴⁰ Ingram, *The Hands of Peace*, 99.

⁴¹ Ingram, *The Hands of Peace*, 116.

⁴² Ingram, *The Hands of Peace*, 115–16.

⁴³ Ingram, *The Hands of Peace*, 116.

⁴⁴ Ingram, *The Hands of Peace*, 117.

⁴⁵ Transcript of the Oral History Interview with Marione Ingram for the Oral History Collection of the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington, September 29, 2016, 18.

against the Nazis. And I had lots of friends, all of us fighting nonviolently.”⁴⁶ Those reassuring thoughts were the same ones Ingram felt when she openly talked with Daniel for the first time, in their Greenwich Village apartment, about her experience of the Hamburg air raid.

Conclusion: “Don’t Stand Idly by, Stand Up.”

Consequently, through her involvement in the civil rights movement, especially the sojourn in Mississippi, voter registration drive, and the establishment of and teaching at a Freedom School, Marione Ingram transformed herself from a “victim” of the Holocaust into a “combatant in a campaign against racial injustice.”⁴⁷ For Ingram, “it was a privilege and often a joy to work with so many people with that kind of courage and conviction.”⁴⁸

However, Ingram said she was unable to show resistance or raise her voice against the Holocaust, adding that “I had grown up with the firm belief that I had a duty to oppose racism whenever I found it. That was an article of faith in our family, but I had never been able to act on it effectively in Europe.”⁴⁹ That is why she felt the civil rights movement, which exercised non-violent resistance, had replaced the helpless rage she had felt as a child.⁵⁰

Ingram is not the only person feeling like this. It is widely recognized among Jews that, with a few exceptions, such as the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in 1943, Jews had shown little resistance against the Nazi’s anti-Semitism and extermination policy, and Jewish leaders had not raised their voices. In the early 1960s, historian Raul Hilberg and philosopher Hannah Arendt argued that European Jews did not confront the Nazi’s extermination policy, deliberately avoided resistance, and acquiesced to the deportation orders. They also pointed out that some Jewish community leaders even facilitated Jewish deportations and exterminations to operate smoothly in order to save ghettos.⁵¹ These points led to feelings of regret and self-reproach among American Jews that they could have made more serious attempts to rescue European Jews.

The aforementioned Holocaust survivors shared a strong feeling of not being mute spectators to discrimination, persecution, and genocide. They

⁴⁶ Ingram, *The Hands of Peace*, 122.

⁴⁷ Ingram, *The Hands of War*, 185.

⁴⁸ Ingram, *The Hands of War*, 185.

⁴⁹ Ingram, *The Hands of War*, 184.

⁵⁰ Ingram, *The Hands of War*, 185.

⁵¹ Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*; Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

argued that it was important to act. In his speech at the March on Washington, Prinz taught that “as a rabbi in Berlin under the Hitler regime,” he learned that the most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful, and the most tragic problem was silence, and not bigotry or hatred.⁵² When Weiss told his father that he would participate in the Freedom Ride, his father resisted and said: “You’re gonna get killed. It’s not us this time. It’s the schvartzes.” Weiss answered, “Hey, you know, this is what happened to you. I’m not gonna stand by.” Weiss really believed that if one saw evil and did nothing about it, they were a participant in it.⁵³

Meanwhile, even before the Holocaust, American Jews often reached out to the plight of African Americans because both groups had experienced being enslaved and continued to suffer discrimination and persecution. For example, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had numerous Jewish executives, including the Spingarn brothers, Joel and Arthur, who took over the presidency from its founding in 1909 until 1966. During the same period, Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck and Company, was inspired by Booker T. Washington’s autobiography, *Up from Slavery*, and served as a board member of the Tuskegee Institute. Furthermore, he generously donated to Negro schools called Rosenwald Schools.⁵⁴

Concern and support for African Americans were not limited to affluent Jews. Yiddish newspapers, such as the *Forward* expressed sympathy for the plight of African Americans and denounced lynching. In New York City, Jewish garment workers’ unions allowed African American workers to join when other unions did not.⁵⁵ In 1931, nine African American teenagers and young men were falsely accused of raping two white women in Scottsboro, Alabama. During the court trials, it was Samuel Leibowitz, a Jewish lawyer from New York, who devoted himself as counsel on behalf of the “Scottsboro Boys” who once were sentenced to death, and finally acquitted them.⁵⁶ Consequently, American Jews empathized with African Americans.

Given the feeling that they had not done enough to save European Jews during the Holocaust, American Jews’ empathy for African Americans they had nurtured since the early 20th century may have turned into actual direct action when the civil rights movement, which had focused on court battles during the

⁵² Meyer, *Joachim Prinz, Rebellious Rabbi*, 261–62.

⁵³ “From the Holocaust to the Freedom Rides.”

⁵⁴ Harlan, “Booker T. Washington’s Discovery of Jews,” 271–73.

⁵⁵ Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land*, 28–88, 96; Kaufman, *Broken Alliance*, 29.

⁵⁶ Friedman, *What Went Wrong?* 63–66, 99–100.

former half of the 20th century, had turned into street-level, direct actions after *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. Those actions included boycotts, demonstration marches, and voter registration drives, and became the movement literally “everyone” could be involved in. Thus, at this time, Jews began not only sharing the sorrow and agony of victims but standing up and raising their voices.

On Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom HaShoah) on April 8, 2021, Ingram gave a lecture to students at Springfield College:

My recommendation is “never be silent.” Always speak up when you hear or see an injustice done, don’t stand by....My advice would be “never ever be silent,” don’t, don’t allow somebody to use the n-word or don’t allow somebody to say something about somebody who is Chinese or Japanese or Vahenga [*sic*] or whatever, speak up as a human being....When I was very young and was confronted with things, when I confronted my boss about why [my black coworker] Joan had to clean bathrooms when she had already finished university and he looked at me as though I had fallen from Mars, you know he just looked with such incomprehension that I couldn’t make and see what I was asking, I quit my job.

Speak up, stand up, and fight, but always non-violently, never use violence, never use a gun, never use your fists, don’t use hideous language, do it with respect and tolerance.⁵⁷

Thus, the civil rights movement served as an opportunity for Jews to stand up and make their voice heard in the U.S., close to home, and to sublimate their feelings about the 6,000,000 lives lost in the Holocaust.

⁵⁷ “Springfield College Hosts Virtual Lecture on Past and Present Fascism and Racism.”

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